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SUBJECT: JORDAN AMENDS LAWS TO ESTABLISH NEW NUCLEAR ENERGY
COMMISSION AND SEPARATE REGULATORY BODY

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proprietary information - not for distribution outside the USG.

Refs: A) Email Burkart-Pisani 3/18/08
B) Amman 233
C) 07 Amman 1764

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Following Parliamentary approval of amendments to two nuclear energy laws, a Royal Decree was issued on March 12, 2008 to appoint five commissioners to the newly established High Commission on Nuclear Energy. All the commissioners are U.S.-educated in nuclear energy or physics, and two are dual U.S.-Jordanian citizens. New High Commissioner Dr. Khaled Touqan briefed U.S. congressional staff members on an MFA-sponsored trip on March 18 on Jordan's nuclear energy plans, reconfirming Jordan's commitment to the Global Nuclear Energy Partnership (GNEP) and indicating its openness to exploring various types of nuclear reactor designs offered worldwide (ref B). END SUMMARY.

Prominent Nuclear Physicist in Minister-rank Post

12. (U) The Jordanian parliament approved in February 2008 Law No. (4), which amended Law No. (42) of 2007 on Nuclear Energy (ref C). The amended law established a new High Commission on Nuclear Energy, consisting of a Council of Commissioners, research staff, and executive staff. The Commission is led by a ministerial-ranked Chairman who reports to the Prime Minister. Four additional Commissioners, based on the Prime Minister's recommendation, are appointed by the Cabinet and confirmed by Royal Decree for a five-year, renewable term. The Commissioners must be Jordanian and specialists in the nuclear science and technology fields. The Chairman assigns a Deputy among the Commissioners, who assumes command during the Chairman's absence. The Chairman and Council Members' salaries and all financial rights are specified by Cabinet.

13. (SBU) A Royal Decree was issued on March 12, 2008 to appoint former Education Minister Dr. Khaled Touqan as the Chairman of Commission; Dr. Kamal Al Araj as Commissioner for International Cooperation Affairs; Dr. Ayman Hawari as Commissioner for Nuclear Reactors; Dr. Nidal Al Zu'bi as Commissioner for Nuclear Fuel Cycles; and Dr. Abdul Halim Wreikat as Commissioner for Nuclear Sciences and their Applications. Araj and Zu'bi are dual

U.S.-Jordanian citizens. All commissioners have PhDs or university degrees in nuclear energy or physics from U.S. institutions, according to Touqan. NOTE: Per ref A, we understand from State/ISN that the announcement of Hawari's appointment may have been premature, as Hawari has still not agreed to return to Jordan to assume the position. END NOTE.

¶4. (U) Article No. 7 of the new law allows the Cabinet, upon the Commission's recommendation, to designate specified areas in the Kingdom as areas for the discovery, extraction, or mining of nuclear materials. If such a determination occurs, no agency will be allowed to grant any license or agreement for research or mining of any raw or natural materials in any of those areas, unless otherwise previously agreed to by the Commission.

¶5. (U) Parliament also approved Law No. (5) on Radiation Prevention and Nuclear Safety and Security for 2008, amending the similarly titled 2007 Law No. (43), to provide for the establishment of a separate Radiation and Nuclear Regulatory Commission. During the March 18 briefing for the Jordanian-sponsored staffdel, Touqan explained that this body would be the closest counterpart to the American Nuclear Regulatory Commission, focusing on nuclear safeguards and regulations while the High Commission focuses on power generation projects.

Jordan Supports GNEP

¶6. (SBU) In response to a Staffdel member comment that the Global Nuclear Energy Partnership (GNEP) did not enjoy universal congressional support, Touqan asserted that Jordan believes the GNEP is an important initiative for trying to meet global energy demands in a responsible way. Jordan intends to be a part of the process as

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the GNEP continues to evolve. Araj added that the GNEP is visionary in that it looks at Generation IV reactors with the aim of reducing toxicity and ensuring no one is able to tamper with or extract fuel.

Looking for Reactor Technology Worldwide

¶7. (SBU) Even if U.S. support for nuclear energy diminished, Touqan opined that Jordan has sufficient allies in this field to stay the course and planned to keep all options open. He noted that Jordan had already begun to engage reactor manufacturers from the U.S. (Westinghouse and GE), Japan, Canada, and France. He said that Jordan is most interested in light water fuel reactor technology, but has not ruled out the Canadian "Candu" reactor which uses natural uranium. The biggest concern with the Candu, according to Touqan, was that the reactor would need to be shut down for two to three years after 20-25 years of operation to do a full, costly refurbishment. Touqan also indicated that Jordan received a proposal from France to build a reactor from start to finish in eight years, contrary to the more common 12-year timeframe, which although ambitious was an attractive prospect. He said Jordan ultimately would consider various factors when deciding on a design, including the lifetime of the reactor, the lowest operating cost, and the capital investment.

Financing Options

¶8. (SBU) When asked how Jordan would finance such a reactor, Touqan estimated that \$1.4 billion would be needed for a 400MW reactor, while \$2.5 to \$2.8 billion would be required for a 1,000MW reactor. Touqan noted, though, that the seemingly high capital investment was made up in significantly cheaper operating costs. He thought that Jordan would be able to finance the reactor through sales revenues of uranium, private financing, or foreign government financing. In particular, he said that, should Jordan go with a French reactor, the French indicated that government financing might be available. Araj added that if Jordan opted for the 1,000MW reactor, which would be too large for Jordan's grid, the excess power could be sold to neighboring countries or used to desalinate water.

Disposal of Waste

19. (SBU) The Staffdel also asked about Jordan's plan for disposal of waste, noting that the U.S. had explored the possibility of using salt mines in Utah. Touqan said that Jordan has geological depots for waste that are promising. He also noted that Jordan signed a nuclear cooperation agreement with France that allows for spent fuel to be sent back to France, where the waste would be reprocessed and then shipped back to Jordan in a more compact form.

Jordanian Public Largely Favors the Nuclear Option

10. (SBU) Regarding public sentiment, Touqan noted that when the idea of developing a peaceful nuclear energy program was first raised, critics did surface. In general, however, he thought that the majority of the people in Jordan were in favor of nuclear energy. He admitted that more needed to be done to educate the public on the benefits and safety of nuclear energy.

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